

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUEBEC 174

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT CA

SUBJ: QUEBEC ELECTIONS

REF: QUEBEC 173

1. RELATIVE POSITIONS FOUR PARTICIPANTS IN OUTCOME QUEBEC OCTOBER 29 ELECTIONS GENERALLY AS EXPECTED, BUT PROPORTION OF VOTE FOR EACH SO DIFFERENT FROM EXPECTATIONS IT HAS COME AS REAL SHOCK TO LOSERS, AND PROBABLY ONLY SOMEWHAT LESS FOR WINNER. ALL PARTIES NOW CONFRONTED WITH NECESSITY MAKE MAJOR DECISIONS WHICH BEFORE HAD NOT BEEN SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED.

2. INDEPENDENCE WAS ISSUE IN ALL CAMPAIGN DEBATES, AND BATTLE LINE WAS REALLY BETWEEN PQ AND THE FIELD. CHOICE CLEARLY WENT AGAINST THE INDEPENDENCE OPTION AT THIS TIME. INDEPENDENCE AS POLITICAL MOVEMENT IN QUEBEC POLITICS HAS HAD SEVERE SETBACK, ESPECIALLY SINCE ALL PROMINENT PQ FIGURES, EXCEPT ROBERT BURNS, WERE DEFEATED.

3. BUT IDEA OF INDEPENDENCE, AS HAS ALREADY BEEN ABUNDANTLY NOTED, HAS NOT BEEN PUT TO REST. PQ INCREASED ALREADY RESPECTABLE PERCENTAGE OF POPULAR VOTE BY SIX POINTS, AND WITH THIRTY PERCENT CAN NOW CLAIM TO REPRESENT ROUGHLY ONE-THIRD QUEBEC ELECTORATE. ADDITIONALLY, PQ HAS BACKING THIRTY-EIGHT PERCENT FRENCH-SPEAKING VOTE, AND IS MOST VOCAL SPOKESMAN FOR THE FRENCH

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NATIONALIST FEELING WHICH ALSO EXISTS IN LIBERAL PARTY.

4. PQ HAS BEEN STUNNED BY DEFEAT, BUT DOES NOT SEEM BROKEN. ONE OR TWO DISAPPOINTED MEMBERS HAVE SUGGESTED PARTY BOYCOTT ASSEMBLY, SINCE PARTICIPATION WOULD BE USELESS WASTE OF ENERGY. EVEN IF THE PARTY WOULD NOT GO THIS FAR, IT CAN HAVE ONLY MINIMUM INFLUENCE IN LEGISLATURE BECAUSE OF PHYSICAL IMPOSSIBILITY FOR SIX MEMBERS TO CARRY ENTIRE OPPOSITION BURDEN AGAINST 102 ON GOVERNMENT SIDE (PC VOTE SO SMALL ITS TWO MEMBERS CANNOT SIT AS PARTY NOR AS OPPOSITION MEMBER ON PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONS). PQ MEMBERSHIP (ASSUMING IT REMAINS INTACT) IS ACTIVE, INTELLIGENT AND ARTICULATE, AND ONCE IT RECOVERS FROM BLOW OF DEFEAT, IT CAN BE EXPECTED TO EXPRESS ITS OPPOSITION AND CARRY ON THE FIGHT IN A NUMBER OF WAYS OUTSIDE THE LEGISLATURE. (SPECULATION ABOUT TAKING TO THE STREETS WAS ONE OF FIRST REACTIONS HEARD AFTER THE DEFEAT, BUT THERE IS NO EVIDENCE NOW PQ WOULD ENCOURAGE OR CONDONE RETURN TO FLQ VIOLENCE.)

5. VOTE WAS PERSONAL VICTORY FOR BOURASSA. PREMIER'S RELATIONS WITH PRESS HAD DETERIORATED SINCE BEGINNING HIS TERM, TO POINT WHERE HE WAS OFTEN PRESENTED IN DECIDEDLY UNFAVORABLE LIGHT DURING CAMPAIGN. SEVERAL OBSERVERS, IN HIS PARTY AND ELSEWHERE, RAISED DOUBTS ABOUT THE KIND OF HIGHLY PERSONALIZED CAMPAIGN HE CONDUCTED, POINTING OUT THE JEAN LESAGE HAD DONE SAME THING IN 1966, WITH DISASTROUS RESULTS. NATURE AND SCOPE OF LIBERAL VICTORY SUGGEST THAT IF BOURASSA IS NOT LOVED, MOST VOTERS THINK HIS KIND OF LEADERSHIP IS GOOD FOR THE PROVINCE.

6. NEAR MONOPOLY IN ASSEMBLY GIVES BOURASSA MAJOR PROBLEMS OF MANAGEMENT (HE IS SAID TO HAVE HOPED TO WIN WITH ABOUT SEVENTY SEATS, AS IN OLD ASSEMBLY). KEEPING UNITY IN PARTY MAY CONSUME MUCH OF HIS TIME; NOT ALL HUNDRED DEPUTIES CAN BE MINISTERS, AND WITH BETWEEN FIFTY AND SIXTY BACKBENCHERS LARGELY UNEMPLOYED OR OCCUPIED WITH MAKE-WORK PROJECTS, SOME MAY TURN MUTINOUS JUST OUT OF BOREDOM. IF BOURASSA WISHES TO AVOID BEING CAST IN ROLE OF DICTATOR (WHICH COMMON FRONT UNION LEADERS ALREADY DOING), HE WILL HAVE TO FIND WAYS OF GIVING OPPOSITION GROUPS THROUGHOUT PROVINCE A VOICE BEFORE PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONS, SINCE PQ OBVIOUSLY CANNOT DO IT. AND IF HE WISHES AVOID GIVING IMPRESSION OF BEING CALLOUS IN MATTERS OF REAL CONCERN TO MANY VOTERS, SUCH AS LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION, HE WILL HAVE TO MOVE ON THESE

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FRONTS, EVEN WITHOUT PRODDING FROM LEGISLATIVE OPPOSITION.

7. DISAPPEARANCE UN AND ONLY TOKEN PRESENCE PC HAVE REDUCED TO MINIMUM REPRESENTATION IN ASSEMBLY OF FORMERLY DOMINANT RURAL AREAS. TOP MINISTERIAL QUALITY AMONG LIBERALS COMES FROM MONTREAL AREA, WHERE PARTY'S MAIN FOCUS IS, AND PQ ALSO ESSENTIALLY A MONTREAL PARTY.

8. THERE MAY BE PRESSURE FOR MORE ELECTORAL REFORM, WITH SOME KIND OF PR, BUT BOURASSA HAS GIVEN NO INDICATION OF BEING MOVED SOON OR FAR BY THIS.

9. COMPLETED TABULATION HAS GIVEN TWO MONTREAL SEATS, FIRST LISTED AS PQ, TO LIBERALS, SO FINAL TALLY NOW IS LIBERALS 102, PQ 6, PC 2, UN 0.
MELBY

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